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Information, Please

Study Shows How FOIA Works—For Now

Associated Press

The CIA's testing of drugs on unwitting Americans, the cancer risks of pregnant women taking the hormone DES, and deficient Kentucky nursing homes have one thing in common—the Freedom of Information Act.

The public received detailed data on all three topics from government files requested under the act.

With the Senate Judiciary Committee planning to take up amendments later this month to restrict the use of the act, the Campaign for Political Rights issued a study Sunday detailing more than 500 examples of how consumers, businesses, journalists, historians, state governments and political groups have used the act to obtain federal documents.

"Many of the 500 cases are familiar stories to the American public," said Peggy Shaker, executive director of the private, liberal group, which opposes the amendments before the Judiciary Committee. "But few people realize that this information would never have left the gov-

ernment's filing cabinets if it weren't for the FOIA."

The 180-page study includes cases of disclosures under the act involving consumer product safety, drug safety, and government behavior control; the environment and nuclear power; fraud, waste and government corruption; labor and civil rights; business, history, foreign affairs and defense; government intrusion into political activities and taxes.

Among the better-known disclosures are those about probes of the assassinations of President Kennedy and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., radiation exposure of U.S. soldiers in nuclear tests during the 1950s and FBI spying on dissenters.

The administration supports the amendments sponsored by Sen. Orrin G. Hatch (R-Utah) that would restrict access to law enforcement, intelligence and business records held by the government. Hatch and the administration argue that the law imposes undue burdens on federal agencies and has not been used as much as originally envisioned.